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ABSTRACT

The nature and function of news in the public life of seventeenth-century New England and the legacy this conception of news left for the development of American newspaper journalism in the eighteenth century are explored in this paper. The paper argues that the origin of American news--its subject matter, style, and method of reporting--is deeply rooted in the religious culture of seventeenth-century New England and that the doctrine of divine providence helped to shape the nature of news and news reporting in America. The publications of Samuel Danforth, Increase Mather, and his son, Cotton Mather, all leading seventeenth-century religious figures, are examined in the paper to illustrate the eclectic, reportorial method of inquiry. The paper claims that the characteristics of news and news reporting that emerged in seventeenth-century New England--event orientation, supported by reportorial empiricism and authoritative interpretation--left an ambiguous legacy, a legacy for "both" orthodoxy and heresy in modern American journalism. The paper concludes that Puritanism in America provided a rich environment for the growth of news and for the growth of a particular methodology for identifying, gathering, reporting, and publishing news stories, and that for the most part, the first newspapers, such as the "Boston News-Letter," continued the news reporting style that had been central to the teleological news system of seventeenth-century New England. (Eighty-three notes and two tables of data are included.) (MS)

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TELEOLOGY AND NEWS

--The Religious Roots of American Journalism, 1630-1730--

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TELEOLOGY AND NEWS

--The Religious Roots of American Journalism, 1630-1730--

On October 17, 1637, Mary Dyer, a supporter of Anne Hutchinson in the religious controversy then swirling through Boston, delivered a hideously deformed still-born child. The women attending the birth decided to keep the miscarriage quiet, but a few details leaked out, and rumors began to spread through the town. Eventually, Governor John Winthrop heard of it, investigated, and ordered the body exhumed. The exhumation was something of a sensation in Boston; a crowd of more than 100 people gathered to gape at the grotesque little corpse.[1]

Mary Dyer's "monstrous birth" was news. Winthrop wrote about it in his journal, suggesting that it was the talk of the town by the spring of 1638. The story was published in a news-sheet in London in 1642, one of the first such publications of a "strange occurrence" to come out of New England. It was prominently featured in the first "history" of the Hutchinson controversy, published in 1644. And it appeared as an item in the "chronological table of some few memorable occurrences" in one of the first surviving New England almanacs. Along with Indian wars, deep snows, earthquakes, shipwrecks, droughts, epidemics, and strange lights in the Southern sky, there it was: "Mrs. Dyer brought forth her horned-four-taloned monster."[2]

Why was this sad miscarriage news in New England in the 1630s? More generally, what was news for these people and why was it news? What was the nature and function of news in the public life of seventeenth-century

New England? And what legacy did this conception of news leave for the development of American newspaper journalism in the eighteenth century? These are the questions this essay will address. Specifically, I will argue that the origin of American news -- its subject matter, style, and method of reporting -- is deeply rooted in the religious culture of seventeenth-century New England.

News was, in a word, teleological. All occurrences -- perhaps especially "strange and wondrous" ones -- were clothed in religious, and therefore public, meaning. In the eighteenth century the teleological meaning of news faded, but the subject matter and style of reporting that had developed in the seventeenth century persisted. American newspapers began to distinguish between news that is <u>important</u> (stories of official public action) and news that is merely <u>interesting</u> (stories of unusual private occurrences). This distinction still lies at the heart of conventional practice in journalism.[3] In other words, after the seventeenth century, the meaning and purpose of much of the news was lost; only the news itself remained.

The Mary Dyer story is a sensational but representative example of seventeenth-century New England news. Though the specific occurrence was strange and unusual, the telling of it was not unusual at all. The Dyer story was typical of popular English street literature of the era. Ballads and broadsides describing "monsters" -- both animal and human -- were standard fare in early seventeenth-century London. Such "strange occurrences" were familiar and routine in the English news system of the time, just as unusual events today are part of the usual and predictable pattern of modern journalism. Clearly, readers then as now were fascinated by sensational stories.[4]

But the Dyer story did not become official public news in New England because it was sensational. It was made news by the authorities, because it contained important public information. In this case, the governor himself conducted the investigation and wrote much of the major report of the episode. He did these things because he saw in this strange birth the designing hand of God. The Dyers were followers of the heretical Anne Hutchinson, and the birth of their "monster" was interpreted as a clear sign of God's opposition to their "monstrous opinions": "Then God himself was pleased to step in which his casting voice, and bring in his own vote and suffrage from heaven, by testifying his displeasure against their opinions and practices, as clearly as if he had pointed with his finger."[5]

In other words, Mary Dyer's "monstrous birth" was not a bizarre private affair; it was a "divine providence," and therefore a "public occurrence" of public importance. Historians have often linked the doctrine of divine providence to Puritan theology and sociology. Some have stressed the Puritan enthrallment with history and the place of New England in it. Both Perry Miller and Sacvan Bercovitch, for example, though disagreeing on much, do agree that the teleology of Puritan thought prompted an obsession with history. History was nothing less than the unfolding of God's plan for mankind, and New England was to be the culmination of it.[6] Other historians (including Miller, of course) have stressed the Puritan interest in nature and cosmology. As in human history, God spoke through the natural order of the cosmos. The interest of Puritan intellectuals in the new science was an effort to read God's meaning out of the book of nature.[7] Still other historians have studied the Puritan fascination with divine prodigies, strange and wondrous occurrences, ranging from fires and shipwrecks to Mary Dyer's baby. This

fascination, of course, was not peculiar to American Puritanism, but was part of a long English and European folk tradition that emigrated, with the Puritans, to New England.[8]

The doctrine of divine providence held that all events -- whether part of the rational order of history and nature or seemingly outside of it -- have meaning, for individuals and for the public. Historians have long placed the doctrine of divine providence at the heart of Puritan thought, for it helps explain the Puritan sense of mission, of errand, and perhaps ultimately of the larger American sense of destiny and progress.[9] But historians have usually been interested in theology and ideology, in symbol and metaphor. Rarely have they explored how this doctrine helped to shape, in a practical way, the system of public communication that developed in seventeenth-century New England. Two exceptions to this generalization are David Hall's "World of Wonders" and Harry Stout's The New England Soul, two recent studies that take the idea of "communication" very seriously. Hall's article links the New England fascination with "wonder stories" and prodigies to English and European tradition. His purpose is to place New England communication practice into a broader trans-Atlantic context. Stout's book is a comprehensive study of the New England sermon, "a medium of communication" that "combined religious, educational, and journalistic functions, and supplied all the key terms necessary to understand existence in this world and the next."[10]

My interest also is in the public communication system of seventeenth-century New England, including "wonder stories" and sermons. But my perspective is somewhat different. My subject is news, the publication of public occurrences, a topic both narrower and broader than the concerns of Hall and Stout. My purpose is to show how the doctrine of divine

providence helped to shape the nature of news and news reporting in America.

II

The nature of the news system of seventeenth-century New England is suggested in the career of Samuel Danforth. Danforth was not the most famous of the early ministers of Massachusetts or the most profound. He spent most of his career as assistant pastor of the church at Roxbury, in the shadow of the senior minister, John Eliot, the famous missionary to the Indians. It's the range of Danforth's career and the nature of his writing that are suggestive. His work as Harvard tutor, astronomer, preacher, parish pastor, and publicist nicely illustrates the interplay among religion, public affairs, and the news in seventeenth-century New England.[11]

For six years following his graduation in 1643, Danforth served as a "reader and fellow" at Harvard College. In addition to his major responsibility as tutor to the undergraduates, Danforth studied for the master's degree and became involved with one of the adjunct enterprises of the college: the printing press. The printing press was a small and tenuous operation at Cambridge in the 1640s, but it was an important one for the mission of the colony. It is a commonplace of Reformation history that the doctrines of Biblical primacy, salvation by faith, and the priesthood of all believers helped to make Protestants a race of Bible readers.[12] But for the New England Puritans, Bible reading was only part of their obligation to literacy and to learning. The special nature of their covenanted society and its place in history required informed

participation in public affairs as well as in private matters of the soul. Given the need of the people to understand God's plan, to interpret his history, and to build his kingdom, it is not surprising that from the beginning the American Puritans were people of the Word -- and of printing.[13]

The early products of the Cambridge press reflected the mission of print in the Puritan community. The first imprint was "the Freeman's Oath" (1639), the formal contract or covenant required of members of the Massachusetts Bay company, the civil government of the colony. The first major work of the press was the so-called "Bay Psalm Book" (1640), a new translation of the psalms into simple rhymed quatrains. Soon the press was turning out catechisms, school books, laws and legal documents, and sermons. None of these works was meant for the private consumption of disconnected individuals. All were conceived and executed as part of the public life of the community.[14]

Another product of the Cambridge press was the almanac, and the compiler of the earliest surviving almanacs was Samuel Danforth. Danforth's main task was astronomical calculations; the title pages of the 1647, 1648, and 1649 editions identify him as "Samuel Danforth of Harvard College, Philomathemat." These almanacs were basically simple books of nature, calendars, and reference guides to the cycles of the sun and moon, the tides and seasons. They were clearly intended for a popular audience. The title pages declared that the astronomical data "may generally serve for the most part of New England." In addition to astronomy, Danforth's almanacs also carried bits of light verse, usually associated with the changing seasons of the year.[15]

But nature was not the only subject of these almanacs. History --

recent history -- was another. A recurrent feature was a "chronological table of some few memorable occurrences," beginning with the arrival of Winthrop's fleet in Boston harbor in 1630. These "memorable occurrences," all keyed to specific dates, were a mixture of historical and natural events. The first type of event included the arrival of the fleet, the first session of the General Court, the Pequod War, and the beginning of printing in the colony. The second type included droughts, epidemics, earthquakes, storms, untimely deaths, strange plagues of pigeons and caterpillars, and, of course, the monstrous birth of Mary Dyer's baby.[16] The two types of occurrences were mingled, and they were presented in the same matter-of-fact tabular style as the movements of the tides and eclipses of the sun. Astronomy, meteorology, history, and prodigy -- they blended together because their meaning was the same. All told parts of the same grand story: God's work in New England.

In 1650, Danforth left Harvard and the almanacs to begin his pastorate in Roxbury. He devoted himself to his flock, preaching, teaching, and caring for the sick and dying. As a preacher, he became known as a "notable text-man," concentrating his regular Sunday sermons on the detailed exegesis of Scripture. But he never lost his interest in astronomy, history, and providence -- and the relationship among them. In 1665, he published a pamphlet titled <u>An Astronomical Description of the Late Comet, or Blazing Star . . . Together with a Brief Theological Application Thereof</u>.[17]

As the title indicates, the pamphlet is divided into two parts: a description of the comet of 1664 and an interpretation of its meaning. The first section is highly empirical. In a simple and straight-forward presentation, Danforth discusses the comet's size, its composition, its

movement in a highly "eccentric orb," and how the sun illuminated its tail. This is factual description. Then comes the "theological application." This section is also empirical, in its way: it is historical. Here Danforth argues that "the histories of former ages do absolutely testify that comets have been many times heralds of wrath to a secure and impentitent world." He lists many such events, beginning with Seneca and ending with the comet of 1652. Next he turns to New England, listing other signs (an earthquake in 1663, deaths of eminent people, a drought, early frosts), which suggest that "the Lord calls upon New England to awake and repent." The burden on New England is especially heavy (though not unbearable), because God expects much from "a people to highly favored and privileged."[18]

Danforth saw the hand of God in more local occurrences as well. In 1674, for example, a young man named Benjamin Goad was hanged for the crime of bestiality. Danforth preached a sermon at the execution, and that sermon became the first American imprint of another popular type of event-oriented publication: the execution sermon. Like the comet's flight, the case of Benjamin Goad was a specific event, but an event filled with public meaning. "God's end in inflicting remarkable judgments upon some, is for caution and warning to all others," Danforth declared. "Such judgments as these have a voice, a loud voice, a clamorous voice, a dreadful voice, calling to all Israel, to hear and fear." Thus, the sad end of this one sad boy became for Puritan New England a story worth preaching and publishing. "Behold now the execution of vengence upon this lewd and wicked youth, whom God hath hanged up before the Sun, and made a sign and example, and instruction and admonishment, to all New England."[19]

Danforth's most famous work was an early contribution to yet another

type of current affairs publication: the election sermon. Election sermons were preached to the representatives of the various towns who gathered in Boston each spring to elect the council to the governor and to take part in the work of the General Court (general assembly) of the colony.[20] The themes of the sermons changed over time, of course; but in the seventeenth century many of them focused on the special place of New England in God's plan for human history. One of these was Samuel Danforth's election sermon of 1670, the title of which contributed a classic phrase to the vocabulary of American historiography. He called his talk A Brief Recognition of New-England's Errand into the Wilderness.[21]

Danforth's theme in this famous sermon was declension -- that is, the decline in commitment of the people to the founding mission of the colony. "Of solemn and serious enquiry to us all in this general assembly," he said, "is whether we have not in a great measure forgotten our errand into the wilderness." Like the Israelites of old, New Englanders in their forty years in the wilderness had lost the vision, the vigor, the passion of the fathers. Like Israel, they had fallen to the worship of false gods -- especially worldly goods. Now God was angry, and his anger was displayed for all to see: "Why hath the Lord smitten us with blasting and mildew now seven years together, super-adding sometimes severe drought, sometimes great tempests, floods, and sweeping rains that leave no food behind them? Is it not because the Lord's house lyeth waste, temple-work in our hearts, families, churches is shamefully neglected." These trials were not intended to destroy New England, but to save it, Danforth explained. God would not abandon his chosen people. His promise was sure, if the people chose to grasp it.[22]

These sermons by Samuel Danforth exemplify both the structure and the

range of what has come to be called the Puritan jeremiad.[23] The jeremiad style was characteristic of a wide range of sermons. Danforth's sermons are early examples of three common types: the election sermon, the execution sermon, and the natural event sermon. Another type that usually followed the jeremiad style was the "humiliation sermon." These sermons were preached on days officially set aside for fasting and humiliation -- that is, days when the people humbled themselves before God and prayed for a return of his favor. Like the other types, the humiliation sermon was almost always an explication of and a meditation upon specific public occurrences.[24]

The fact that all of Danforth's publications were event-oriented is not surprising. Most publications in New England in the seventeenth century were. My own rough review of the seventeenth-century New England titles listed in Charles Evans' American Bibliography shows that 55 percent were clearly and principally linked to events, occurrences, and actions of one sort or another.[25] (See Tables 1 and 2.) Making sense of events was an important task for ministers, for public officials, and for the printing press. Harry Stout, though writing about sermons only, makes this point quite well:

> Throughout the 1670s and 1680s, more fast day sermons (fourteen) were printed at Cambridge than any other type of sermon except election sermons. To understand this publishing pattern, one must recognize that in New England print functioned primarily as a historical tool rather than evangelistic tool. It was not intended to represent regular preaching but to chart the children's location in providential history.[26]

Table 1 About Here

In short, most Puritan publicists like Danforth were obsessed with events, with the news. They could see all around them the providence of God. The great movements of celestial and human history were the prime considerations, but little things carried meaning as well. In what might be the first flu story in the history of American news reporting, Michael Wigglesworth wrote these stanzas in 1662 in his poem "God's Controversy with New England":

> Our healthful days are at an end
> And sicknesses come on
> From year to year, because our hearts
> Away from God are gone. . . .
>
> Now colds and coughs, rhewms, and sore-throats,
> Do more and more abound:
> Now agues sore and fevers strong
> In every place are found.[27]

III

Samuel Danforth died in 1674, the year the General Court of Massachusetts lifted its ban on printing outside Cambridge.[28] This easing of official control over the printing process would have in the long run profound consequences. Quickly, Boston would eclipse Cambridge as the printing capital of New England; more slowly, the commercial milieu of Boston would transform printing from a purely public enterprise to a nearly private one. The latter consequence, however, would take considerable

time. Most of the early publications struck off in the first Boston print shops followed the publication traditions laid down in Cambridge in Samuel Danforth's day -- including the commitment to teleological news.

The first two imprints of the first Boston press, set up by John Foster in 1675, were typical teleological news pieces. Both began with local current events and then proceeded to explicate the meaning of those events for public life. The full titles nicely summarize the subject matter and the purpose of these two sermons:

> The Wicked Man's Portion. Or a Sermon Preached at the Lecture in Boston in New England the 18th Day of the 1 Month 1674. When Two Were executed. Who Had Murdered Their Master.
>
> The Times of Men Are in the Hands of God. Or a Sermon Occasioned by That Awful Providence Which Happened in Boston in New England. The 4th Day of the 3rd Month 1675 (When Part of a Vessel Was Blown Up in the Harbor, and Nine Men Hurt, and Three Mortally Wounded).

The author of these two sermons was Increase Mather, one of the leading ministers of Boston and the chief patron of the new Boston press. No prominent Puritan leader was more enthralled than Mather by events and their meaning for public life. And no previous age in the history of Massachusetts was more harried by events than the two decades that followed the publication of Mather's two news sermons in 1675. Though Mather was far from the only Puritan publicist interested in the events of the day, his personal theology, his political prominence, and his penchant for publication all combined with the crush of occurrences to call forth an outpouring of teleological news in Boston. Indeed, it may fairly be said that Increase Mather's publication record in the last quarter of the seventeenth century represents the first major flowering indigenous American journalism.[29]

The wellspring of Mather's journalism was his ardent devotion to the

doctrine of providences. Like most New England Puritans, he believed that God's will could be read out of nature and history. In 1675, when New England suffered the worst calamity in its history, Mather was convinced that he had seen it coming the year before, in his sermon The Day of Trouble is Near. "It was much in my thoughts that God would visit with the sword for the reason mentioned in my sermons," he wrote later in his autobiography. "Afterward, I saw that those thoughts were from God. For in the year 1675 the war with the Indians (which lasted for several years) began."[30]

This was King Philip's War. New Englanders had fought Indians before, but never before had the Indians been so well-armed, so well-organized, and so relentless as they now were under King Philip, the chief sachem of the Wampanoag. At war's end -- with Philip dead and thousands of his followers slaughtered or sold into slavery -- New England was victorious. But it was a melancholy victory. In a little more than one year in 1675-76, one of every sixteen men in New England had been killed. In proportion to population, this was the deadliest war in American history. The war was an economic catastrophe as well. Half the towns were damaged; at least twelve were completely destroyed. And per capita income in New England did not recover for a century.[31]

For Increase Mather, the war was a prodigy of terrifying import. Long before the war ended, he began the process of reporting and interpretation, of reading out of the events of the war God's message for the people of New England. In 1676, he published the most substantial piece of American journalism up to that time, A Brief History of the War with the Indians of New-England. Appended to this small book and also released as a separate pamphlet was a sermon on the war titled An Earnest

Exhortation to the Inhabitants of New-England.[32] Mather's theme was simple: This war was a judgment laid down upon a sinful people. For a generation, God had spared "The English Israel," until the sins of the people grew "ripe for so dreadful a judgment, until the body of the first generation was removed, and another generation risen up which hath not so pursued, as ought to have been, the blessed design of their Fathers, in following the Lord into this wilderness."[33]

Mather's style was as simple as his theme. In A Brief History, he said, his purpose was simply to provide an impartial narrative of events. At the end he wrote:

> Thus have we a brief, plain, and true story of the war with the Indians in New England, how it began, and how it hath made its progress, and what present hopes there are of a comfortable closure and conclusion of this trouble; which hath been continued for a whole year and more. Designing only a breviary of the history of this war; I have not enlarged upon the circumstances of things, but shall leave that to others, who have advantages and leisure to go on with such an undertaking.[34]

Certainly his method was plain, empirical, and narrative; and A Brief History reads unmistakably as a piece of popular journalism, an instant book dashed off while the fires of the war were still smoldering. But Mather's statement that he did not enlarge upon the circumstances of things is disingenuous, in the way such statements usually are. The story is built of rough-cut occurrences, but the teleological themes, or circumstances, are always clear. Indeed, God speaks as clearly through Mather's war as he had through Danforth's comet.

For Mather, as for New England in general, King Philip's War was only the beginning of a flood tide of momentous events. And many of Mather's publications, from 1676 until his death in 1723 at age 84, were devoted to the reporting and interpretation of teleological news. Mather's most

famous work of this type (something of a best seller for its time) was An Essay for the Recording of Illustrious Providences, published in Boston in 1684. This book grew from a proposal adopted by the ministers of the colony in 1681 to collect, organize, and publish accounts of "illustrious providences" and "notable occurrences," such as "divine judgments, tempests, floods, earthquakes, thunders as are unusual, strange apparitions, or whatever else shall happen that is prodigious."[35] This book lived up to the proposal. It is a thick compilation of wonder stories of all sorts, ranging from witchcrafts to harrowing shipwrecks to medical oddities. An Essay is enormously detailed and eclectic. It demonstrates some appreciation for the new science and the scientific method; yet it is equally dependent upon the older genres of the supernatural that were still popular in the folklore and the printed popular literature of England and Europe.[36] In a companion sermon published the same year, Mather made it clear that all of these strange occurrences must be considered the proper judgments of God.[37]

Mather remained fascinated with strange and singular occurrences, and he continued to write about them. He published works on comets in the 1680s, witchcrafts in the 1690s, storms, earthquakes, and fires in the early decades of the eighteenth century.[38] His theme remained as steady as his fascination. In 1711, with much of Boston in charred ruins, Mather explained the meaning of this most prodigious event of the new century: "All things whatsoever are ordered by the Providence of God. . . . When a fire is kindled among a people, it is the Lord that hath kindled it."[39]

Mather's interest in events, however, was not limited to "wonders." He also participated in, reported on, and interpreted the major political events of his time. And political events broke rapidly after 1676. With

King Philip's war barely ended, Massachusetts entered upon nearly two decades of imperial turmoil. The major events are well known: the tightening of English imperial control in the 1670s; the revocation of the Massachusetts charter and the creation of the Dominion of New England in 1683-84; the Glorious Revolution of 1688-89 in England and America; the restoration of the charter (much altered) in 1691.[40] These events were news in New England. As Table 2 suggests, a good deal of the increase in "event-oriented publication" in New England after 1674 came in the form of non-sermon political and historical narratives. Many of these were political tracts and news sheets concerning these great events of empire.[41]

Table 2 About Here

One of the contributors to this new political journalism was Increase Mather. While serving as agent for Massachusetts Bay in London from 1688 to 1691, Mather wrote several political pieces, the most notable was A Narrative of the Miseries of New-England, By Reason of an Arbitrary Government Erected There under Sir Edmund Andros (London, 1688). This pamphlet was directed mainly toward English readers, though it circulated in America as well. For the home audience, he wrote several letters that were published as the broadside The Present State of the New-English Affairs (Boston, 1689).[42] Neither of these news tracts is overtly teleological, except for conventional phrases such as "it has pleased God to succeed endeavors and solicitations here so far." For the most part, Mather builds his arguments with a more political vocabulary, including the rights of property and due process of law.[43] But underlying Mather's political argumentation lay the bed-rock of the covenant and of New

England's special place in history. When the Crown first proposed to alter the beloved charter, Mather insisted that the issue was more than political. To submit would be sin, for the charter, like New England itself, was ordained of God.[44]

Though Increase Mather was probably the leading proponent of the teleological news system in New England in the late seventeenth century, he certainly was not alone. As Table 2 shows, publication in general was highly event-oriented in this era. For example, teleological news routinely figured into the work of Cotton Mather, Increase's son and the leading Boston publicist of his generation. Cotton's first published sermon was an execution sermon. In 1686, the 23-year-old minister preached to a large crowd gathered for the hanging of a murderer named James Morgan. Like Danforth, Mather drew general meaning from the specific event, portraying Morgan as merely the ripened fruit of the sin that infected all New England. His performance was apparently a strong one, for people throughout the region "very greedily desired the publication" of it, Mather noted in his diary; and it subsequently "sold exceedingly." Mather's second published sermon (1687) was another type of event-oriented publication, the "artillery sermon," preached on the day militia leaders were selected.[45] At the end of his life, Cotton Mather was still reporting and interpreting the events of the day. His last sermons were preached in the late fall of 1727, just a few weeks before he died in February, 1728. These sermons dwelled on the meaning of the earthquake that had shaken New England on October 29, with aftershocks continuing through December. Mather's sermons and their technical appendices provided an empirical account of the earthquake, much as Danforth described the comet of 1664. And like Danforth, Mather had no doubt that this event carried profound

public meaning. His first sentence, preached the morning after the quake, makes this vividly clear: "The glorious God has roared out of Zion."[46]

Cotton Mather did not always preach or write on current events, of course, but the doctrine of God's providence was never far from his mind. Once during a church service, a thunderstorm swept through Boston. While the storm raged, Mather preached an impromptu sermon on the meaning of thunderstorms -- and later published it.[47]

Cotton Mather's great work, Magnalia Christi Americana (London, 1702), represents a kind of culmination of seventeenth-century teleological publication. This massive work is a virtual encyclopedia of events in the history and the current history of New England, ranging from biography to Indian wars to the usual compilation of "illustrious, wonderful providences." As he explained in his introduction, his interest was action and occurrence:

> I introduce then, the Actions of a more eminent importance, that have signalized those Colonies: whether the Establishments, directed by their Synods; with a rich variety of Synodical and Ecclesiastical Determinations; or, the Disturbances, with which they have been from all sorts of temptations and enemies tempestuated; and the Methods by which they have still weathered out each horrible tempest.
>
> And into the midst of these Actions, I interpose an entire Book wherein there is, with all possible veracity, a Collection made of Memorable Occurrences, and amazing Judgments and Mercies befalling many particular persons among the people of New England.[48]

Like his father, Cotton Mather believed that it was his divine calling to be a reporter of events:

> To regard the illustrious displays of that Providence wherewith our Lord Christ governs the world, is a work, than which there is none more needful or useful for a Christian: to record them is a work, than which, none more proper for a minister.[49]

IV

Events loomed large in the Puritan imagination. This has been the theme so far. The doctrine of divine providence and the belief in the special mission of New England clothed all occurrences -- from major political events to odd changes in the weather -- with meaning and importance. It is little wonder, then, that the reporting of events held such a central place in seventeenth-century New England publication, from Samuel Danforth's almanacs to Cotton Mather's Magnalia. Simple event-orientation, however, was not the only common characteristic of this literature. There were similarities also in how events were selected and reported and in how they were interpreted. I will call these characteristic styles reportorial empiricism and authoritative interpretation. The fact that these characteristics -- reporting and interpretation -- can be considered separately is important, important for understanding both their harmony in the seventeenth century and their occasional disharmony thereafter.

By reportorial empiricism I mean that the teleological literature of seventeenth-century New England was highly empirical, but the style was eclectic and reportorial, not systematic and scientific. The methodology was essentially what journalists today call "news reporting": the routine collation and citation of the statements of sources.[50] The sources ranged widely, from the classic works of antiquity to the best scientists of the age to folklore to the average person with a story to tell. The role of the writer was not to conduct systematic empirical research, but rather to report the empirical statements of others. Such a methodology was empiricism without science. It was, in a word, journalism.

The earliest almanacs provide the model, in skeletal form, for this kind of eclectic, reportorial empiricism. On the one hand, they were handbooks of astronomy, based on the most dependable scientific sources. On the other hand, they were lists of scattered occurrences, based on official record, local legend, and word of mouth. Danforth elaborated this method in his teleological sermons. His comet sermon of 1665, for example, combined scientific observation with long lists of occurrences, chosen to show that comets were heralds of calamity. Some of these occurrences were well-known recent events: earthquakes, droughts, early frosts. Others were borrowed from a variety of sources, named and unnamed, from Roman times onward. Events were selected and included because they fit a conventional pattern. For Danforth, the recent comet was a remarkable event but not a mysterious one. Its meaning was conventional and clear, for it was merely the latest manifestation of a type of event that had occurred and recurred throughout history.[51]

Increase Mather's method was even more relentlessly empirical, but in this same reportorial fashion. Mather was intensely curious about the natural world and deeply impressed by the scientific method. In fact, his early twentieth-century biographer portrays him as something of a genuine scientist.[52] However more recently, Mather's method in such works as An Essay for the Recording of Illustrious Providences has been described as "pseudoscience." Throughout An Essay, Mather endeavors to tell stories that are accurate and true. He assures the reader that this information comes from reliable sources, eyewitnesses whenever possible.[53] But for the most part Mather does not in any systematic way evaluate the quality of this mass of information. He merely reports it. His sources range from scientific treatises to folklore to rumor; and he permits all to have their

say. Though Robert Middlekauff has argued that such a style "is not genuinely empirical," it is empirical in its way. The empirical data are the statements of the sources. Mather's method is the empiricism of the news reporter, not the scientist.[54]

Cotton Mather was more of a scientist than his father was. More than any other American of his age, Cotton studied the new sciences then blossoming in England and Europe. But Cotton Mather was mainly "a disseminator and popularizer of new scientific knowledge," according to his recent biographer, Kenneth Silverman. He did engage in careful observations of nature himself, but he was not a true experimentalist. Moreover, he was an indiscriminate collector of curiosa, which he regularly sent to the Royal Society in England. These include stories of prehistoric bones, medical oddities and cures, dreams, monstrous births, rattlesnakes, apparitions, and "rainbows as prognostics." Some of his curiosa were supported with references to Descartes, Halley, and Newton; others seem based more in folklore and rumor. And like his father, Mather rarely evaluated the quality of this sort of information. He simply reported it as given by his sources. His method, as Kenneth Silverman has said, was often "an amassment of illustrations and quotations." Silverman resists charging Mather with "credulity," as his nineteenth-century critics were prone to do, because Mather's method was a common one of the time.[55] Indeed, it was -- especially among those for whom religion was more compelling than science.

The eclectic, reportorial method of inquiry illustrated by Danforth and the Mathers was especially congenial to an empiricism that was "always a handmaid to religion."[56] The purpose of these writers was not to build or to test theory. Their theory was given. The doctrine of divine

providence specified the "first cause" of historical, natural, and seemingly unnatural occurrences. These occurrences, despite their surface strangeness, were intelligible because they represented types of events that had occurred before in an intelligible pattern, a pattern drawn by God. Like the scientific method, the method of Danforth and the Mathers was profoundly empirical, for the Lord spoke through the concrete reality of the material world. But unlike the scientific method, their method was not truly experimental, for its object was the documentation of the already known. It is precisely for this reason that the Puritan publicists freely urged believers to study events themselves, to read God's word in the book of nature and history, just as they urged the common folk to search the Scriptures. They had no doubts that anyone could see what God himself had placed there to be seen.

Because they believed that the meaning of an event was inherently embedded within the event itself, the Puritan leaders of seventeenth-century New England talked more about reporting providences than interpreting them. Collecting, recording, and publishing simple factual accounts of occurrences was a valuable and meaningful project in itself. The almanacs offered no interpretation, just lists of occurrences. Similarly, the great histories and collections of providences, such as An Essay and Magnalia, were more narrative reports than interpretations. Reporting was simple and empirical because new events struck these reporters as so obviously part of a recurrent pattern of occurrences. But if interpretation was neglected, it was only because the proper interpretation seemed self-evident. Behind the bare-bones recording of occurrences lay an unmistakable commitment to interpretation by authority.

Mary Dyer's monstrous birth, for instance, was at first concealed,

with the consent of the Rev. John Cotton, who thought the divine message contained in it might be meant for the private instruction of the parents alone. Governor Winthrop listened to this argument courteously, then brushed it aside. The interpretation of such occurrences must be a public, not a private, matter. As the official leadership of the community, he and the other magistrates would decide what it meant.[57] This pattern persisted. In all the teleological literature, the people were urged to open their eyes to the events of the age; but the authorities would tell them what they saw.

Authoritative control of interpretation took several forms. Perhaps most important was simply the conventional nature of teleological news. Because events were considered part of a pattern of recurrence, some events were more likely to be reported than others. They were standard genres, and everyone knew what they meant. The chapters of Increase Mather's An Essay for the Recording of Illustrious Providences, for example, nicely suggest the conventional topics of seventeenth-century teleological news: shipwrecks, preservations, thunder and lightning, tempests, witches and demons, deformities, and so on. No matter how strange or new, such events were meaningful, for they were merely the latest recurrences of types of events that fit into the larger pattern of God's work in history.

Other forms of authoritative control over interpretation were more direct. One was the designation by the government of official public events through days of humiliation and thanksgiving. Certainly, New Englanders were encouraged to examine their own lives in private and to meditate upon their private sins. But much of the interpretation of events and occurrences was made explicitly public through specific governmental proclamation. Another form of authoritative control lay in the system of

public preaching. The simple regularity of community worship and the centrality of the sermon in the Puritan church placed each local minister in a unique position to interpret events, as they happened, week by week.[58]

Control by authority was most strict and centralized when publication was involved. In 1662 the General Court set up an official board of censorship, "for prevention of irregularities and abuse to the authority of this country by the printing press." This system of supervising and licensing publication continued, on and off, until it gradually faded away in the early eighteenth century. One of the members of the licensing board in the 1670s, when printing was first permitted in Boston, was none other than the chief customer of the press, Increase Mather.[59] There were non-governmental controls on publication as well. For example, though the ministers encouraged widespread collecting of providential stories, they sought only centralized, authorized publication. The 1681 proposal for "the recording of illustrious providences," passed by a general meeting of the ministers of the colony was quite explicit: "When any thing of this nature shall be ready for the press, it appears on sundry grounds very expedient, that it should be read, and approved of at some meeting of the Elders, before publication."[60]

In times of troubles, when divine providences seemed to multiply, the centralized control over the interpretation and publication of events tended to strengthen the authority of the ministerial elite. This was true, for example, during King Philip's War and its aftermath. This catastrophe produced a flood of publications: proclamations, news sheets, narratives, and instant "histories."[61] Most of this material was designed to portray the events of the war in the standard, authoritative, teleological fashion: These were God's judgments upon a back-sliding

people. The worse the calamity and the more strikingly conventional the news, the stronger the claim to authority of those prophets who had seen it coming. In his Earnest Exhortation, Increase Mather exalted in this rejuvenated authority:

> Hearken to the voice of God in the Ministry of his work, mind what the Messengers of God speak in his name, for surely the Lord will do nothing but he revealeth his secrets to his Servants the Prophets. . . . What though in these days Ministers are not infallible? yet they are in respect of Office Watchmen and Seers, and therefore you may expect that God will communicate Light to you by them, yea they told you of these days before they came.[62]

King Philip's War was the first great news story for the Boston press, and virtually all of the early literature on the war rested squarely within the authoritative teleological news tradition exemplified by Increase Mather. The war, however, also stirred up a new sort of alternative journalism of quite different slant. This material wasn't published immediately, as was Increase Mather's instant history. But the fact that it was published at all suggests what could happen in a system that emphasized the eclectic reporting of occurrences: Reporting had the potential to drift beyond the control of authoritative interpretation.[63]

The first and most notable piece of this sort was Mary Rowlandson's account of her captivity by the Indians, The Sovereignty and Goodness of God . . . being a Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson (Cambridge, 1682). This was the first of what would become an extraordinarily popular genre of American literature, the captivity narrative. Mrs. Rowlandson's story seemed to be a simple chronological report of occurrences. Yet, thematically, it was a much more subtle and personal work than either Mather's or Hubbard's. As its title suggests, its theme was the unfolding of God's providence. But the perspective was much more individual than national. Mrs. Rowlandson's story was not

antithetical to the authoritative interpretation; just different. Benjamin Church's Entertaining Passages Relating to Philip's War (Boston, 1716), on the other hand, was antithetical. Church was a frontiersman and leader of the troops in battle, and his narrative was a story of self-reliant individualism. Divine providence entered into his story not at all. Significantly, Church's narrative did not appear in print in Boston until 1716.[64]

In the seventeenth century there was little overt disharmony between the reporting and the interpretation of occurrences. But as the Rowlandson and Church narratives suggest, an eclectic, decentralized method for reporting events has the potential to undermine the centralized, authoritative interpretation of them. Events have lives of their own, and people will read out of them what they will. In other words, the potential for heresy lurks in journalism as well as in religion. Indeed, the situation is perfectly analogous to doctrinal conflict in Bible-based Protestantism. When believers are urged to search the Scriptures, they sometimes see things that the authorities do not see. Sola Scriptura and the priesthood of all believers are the formulae for schism. So it is in journalism -- that is, in reading God's book of occurrences.

Thus, the characteristics of news and news reporting that emerged in seventeenth-century New England -- event orientation, supported by reportorial empiricism and authoritative interpretation -- left a wonderfully ambiguous legacy, a legacy for both orthodoxy and heresy in modern American journalism.

V

By the time the newspaper arrived in New England in the early eighteenth century, the news system was in place. Of course, the newspaper itself was nothing new. New Englanders had long read newspapers from England. And to a large extent the first American newspapers simply copied the London newspaper press of the time.[65] Still, though derivative of the London model, the style of newspaper journalism that emerged in eighteenth-century America was also remarkably congruent with the teleological news system of seventeenth-century New England. Though increasingly secularized, the news would remain event-oriented, devoted to unusual (but conventional) occurrences, and dependent upon the method of reportorial empiricism. Newspapers would also tend to remain within the fold of authority, but journalistic heresy would grow endemic in the system as well.

The first successful American newspaper, the Boston News-Letter, founded in 1704, is a case in point. Though the paper sometimes carried pamphlet reprints, political speeches, and opinion pieces, it was essentially a weekly journal of occurrences. This reflected the London model, much beloved of the News-Letter proprietor, John Campbell. During his years of editorship, Campbell's main concern was to build an on-going record of events. He made this purpose clear in a self-congratulatory summary statement at the end of his first year in business:

> And if any will consult the Public Prints of England in that time, considering that they Print 2 or 3 times a week, and that we did Print here but once in a week; they will find no one piece of material News that is in them, omitted in ours: As also in our Prints you have the public occurrences from the West-Indies and other parts: and likewise those from our Neighboring Provinces, besides those of this and the Province of New Hampshire . . . and a great many Providences now Recorded, that would otherwise be lost.[66]

In other words, Campbell's purpose was to imitate the London newspaper press, while also continuing the tradition of the "recording of providences." The Boston News-Letter was in part a kind of expanded, modernized, Anglicized version of "the chronological table" of the early New England almanacs. Its first year of publication set the pattern. The lead news was usually European chronology -- court politics, battle action, official pronouncements -- reported as sequentially as possible. Political news from Boston and the other American colonies was spottier, but also wedded, as much as Campbell could make it, to a chronological record of official occurrences. Then there were the "providences." Reports of storms, fires, Indian attacks, executions, and other such familiar fare appeared in the first year's run of the Boston News-Letter. How these occurrences were handled suggests something about the new role for the newspaper in the teleological news system of New England.

Most of Campbell's providential items were factual and terse. He mentions in a brief story about a fire in the Anchor Tavern that the blaze was quickly put out, "by God's good signal Providence." But usually only the facts, no interpretations, were presented. For example: "On Friday last, there was a great thunder shower of rain, together with great hail stones." That's the complete story, and a fairly typical one.[67] Several major events drew more extended coverage in the News-Letter in 1704. For several issues, the paper carried accounts of a great storm that had swept through England and Europe. These reports were quite detailed, given the space available in Campbell's two-page paper.[68] On the local level, Campbell published a series of stories on the capture, trial, and execution of several pirates in Boston.[69] Like the reports of the storm in Europe, the piracy news was highly empirical, with very few interpretive statements

included.

The interpretation of these occurrences was supplied outside the newspaper by the ministerial and political elite. The very afternoon of the Anchor Tavern fire, both Increase Mather and Samuel Willard preached and prayed on the subject. Cotton Mather delivered a sermon on the execution of the pirates and published it shortly thereafter. And Increase Mather preached at least twice on the great storm in Europe. He reviewed the details of the news, and then moved on to the standard teleological theme: "The stormy winds do not come of themselves, but it is the word of the Lord that does raise them." Storms were "public judgments" sent to punish sin and to presage other calamities. "We must be deaf indeed," Mather declared, "if such loud calls, if such astonishing Providences, do not at all awaken us."[70]

Interpretation in the newspaper itself came almost exclusively in the form of official political statements. Punctuating the terse chronologies were the texts of proclamations and speeches by the governor, the queen, and the Parliament.[71] The voice of governmental authority was the only source of interpretation in the Boston News-Letter. For reporting the facts of occurrences, however, Campbell relied on whatever information happened to come to him. In his third issue, for example, he related an exciting story about a young girl kidnaped briefly by Indians near Piscataqua. It turned out to be a hoax, concocted and reported by the girl herself. This was probably the first though certainly not the last time Campbell was hoodwinked by an unreliable source.[72] But, then, he never saw his duty as the systematic verification of information. Following in the tradition of reportorial empiricism, he simply recorded information supplied to him by his sources.

In this way, the Boston News-Letter continued the news reporting style that had been central to the teleological news system of seventeenth-century New England -- with one important exception. Campbell included even less interpretive material than his predecessors had. Sometimes official occurrences were followed by official statements of interpretation, but most occurrences -- especially providential occurrences -- were not. In short, Campbell reported teleological news, but without the teleology. He was pleased to leave the interpretation to the proper authorities, outside the newspaper.

Not all early eighteenth-century newspapers were as deferential to authority as the Boston News-Letter, and not all were as concerned about recording the official "thread of occurrences" in European politics. But all were devoted to the recording of events and to reportorial empiricism. Even James Franklin's New-England Courant, the first decidedly heretical newspaper in America, fit the emerging pattern. Indeed, Franklin cunningly used the tradition of reportorial empiricism to justify his disregard of the authority of Boston's ministerial elite. For example, during the controversy that raged in Boston in 1721-22 over smallpox inoculation, Franklin declared his newspaper "impartial":

> The Courant was never designed for a Party Paper. I have once and again given out, that both Inoculators and Anti-Inoculators are welcome to speak their Minds in it. . . . What my own Sentiments of things are, is of no Consequence, nor any matter to any Body: I hereby invite all Men, who have Leisure, Inclination and Ability, to speak their Minds, with Freedom, Sense and Moderation, and their Pieces shall be welcome to a Place in my Paper.[73]

Franklin claimed impartiality because he simply reported the statements of his sources. He did not investigate anything himself; he merely reported. Of course, his sources happened to be almost exclusively

anti-inoculation as well as highly critical of local ministerial authority. To the old guard, such as Increase Mather, then in his 80s, Franklin's newspaper was impudent and outrageous -- a libelous assault upon traditional authority. Indeed, it was. But it was also in the style of reportorial empiricism that Increase Mather himself had helped to pioneer nearly half a century before. Rather like Franklin, Mather had assured his readers in his account of King Philip's War that he simply reported the facts: "I hope that in one thing, (though it may be in little else) I have performed the part of an Historian, viz. in endeavoring to relate things truly and impartially."[74]

Few American newspapers of the eighteenth century were as blandly orthodox as Campbell's News-Letter or as stridently heretical as Franklin's Courant. Most fell somewhere in between, including the classic American newspaper of the age, the Pennsylvania Gazette. Published after 1729 by James Franklin's brother Benjamin, the Pennsylvania Gazette bore a resemblance to both the New-England Courant and the Boston News-Letter. Like the Courant, the Gazette was not merely the voice of authority; and like James, Ben relied on the tradition of eclectic reporting to explain the (usually mild) heterodoxy of the paper. As a printer and journalist (if not as a scientist), Benjamin Franklin followed the style of reportorial empiricism, collecting and recording information from whatever sources he could tap. In words reminiscent of the Courant, he idealized the method in his famous "Apology for Printers":

> Printers are educated in the Belief, that when Men differ in Opinion, both Sides ought equally to have the Advantage of being heard by the Public. . . . Printers naturally acquire a vast Unconcernedness as to the right or wrong Opinions contained in what they print; regarding it only as the Matter of their daily labor.[75]

When people complained about something in the paper, he simply invited them

to become sources themselves.[76]

In the matter of news, the Pennsylvania Gazette bore a strong resemblance to the Boston News-Letter. The first issue under Franklin's editorship carried a speech by the governor and brief items on foreign occurrences, local elections, local court rulings, and ship sailings.[77] For Franklin, like Campbell, news meant the orderly, factual record of official public occurrences -- but not only that. Shortly after he took charge of the Gazette Franklin asked his readers to become sources. He asked them to send in reports of "every remarkable accident, occurrence, etc., fit for public notice." Apparently, they did, for over the next few weeks the paper did indeed carry some remarkable (though not unfamiliar) items: some drownings, a large panther shot, two men hanged, a 100-year-old woman died, a murder trial, a snake active in winter, and so on. Some were written up in the newspaper style that would later be termed "bright":

> And sometime last Week, we are informed, that one Piles a Fiddler, with his Wife, were overset in a Canoe near Newtown Creek. The good Man, 'tis said, prudently secured his Fiddle, and let his Wife go to the Bottom.[78]

All of these stories would still be familiar newspaper fare today. And they would have been familiar as well one hundred years earlier in Franklin's native New England. The recording of occurrences mattered to Benjamin Franklin just as it had mattered to Increase Mather and Samuel Danforth and John Winthrop -- but with a difference. What had been divine providence had become by 1729 simply the news.

VI

It could be said that in seventeenth-century New England news was anything that might cause the reader or listener to say, "Oh, my God." In

the late nineteenth century, the same definition was used by the purveyors of popular "yellow" journalism.[79] But, of course, the news, like the exclamation, had by then been drained of religious meaning. Just as the phrase "Oh, my God" lived on long after it had lost its force as prayer, so the news lived on after it had lost its role in religion. News that had once been important had become merely interesting.

The method of reporting the news remained familiar as well. The great metropolitan newspapers of the late nineteenth century developed, for the first time, professional reporting staffs. But the enormous eclecticism of news reporting continued, even increased, as newspapers harnessed modern communications technology to the gathering and printing of "all the news" -- that is, everything that could be gleaned from every varied source imaginable. Some newspapers preferred sensational events: murders, sex scandals, monstrous births. But sensationalism was only part of it, a small part. All newspapers, whether sensational or not, gathered news items simply because they fit the usual pattern of unusual occurrences. The Chicago Times of the 1870s and '80s, for example, every day carried long columns of news briefs, thousands of little occurrences reported from all over the world. Here are just the first few items from one such column of news from the Midwest:

> They have a chain gang in Fort Wayne.
> Terre Haute is going to have a soup house.
> An Indiana man has 17,000 cat skins for sale.
> Here comes Greencastle, Ind., with the small pox.
> The crusaders of Keokuk will soon commence street work.[80]

And so on and on and on. What was the meaning of this strange litany? There was no meaning. It was just the news.

The pattern persists in our own day. The astonishing eclecticism of the late-nineteenth-century papers such as the Chicago Times has subsided;

newspapers are now more selective and tightly edited. But the reporting and recording of interesting -- if not important -- news items continues in the familiar way.[81] Ordinarily, the news isn't really sensational: an auto accident nearby, a storm in Texas, a chicken egg shaped like a bowling pin. Major disasters and wonders warrant more elaborate reporting. Even strange births still make the news, especially in the supermarket tabloids:

> 78-Year-Old Granny Is Expecting Twins.
> Electric Shock Makes 5-Year-Old Girl Pregnant.
> Great Grandma, 66, Has 11-Ounce Baby.[82]

The ring of the news is familiar. Though the stories are singular, they are not surprising. They are part of a conventional pattern. As in the seventeenth century, the remarkable occurrence still seems more an archetypal recurrence than something genuinely new. Only now no one knows what these stories mean.

My purpose in this essay is not to argue that modern American journalism is nothing more than secular Puritanism or that the modern journalist is merely a fallen saint. Journalism is much more complex than that, and Puritanism was far from the only force acting upon American journalism in its formative years. My purpose is more limited. It is simply to suggest that Puritanism in America -- especially the doctrine of divine providence and the notion of New England's special place in history -- provided an enormously rich environment for the growth of news and for the growth of a particular methodology for identifying, gathering, reporting, and publishing news stories.

In 1637, John Winthrop described an early New England fast day:

> A general fast was kept in all the churches. The occasion was, the miserable estate of the churches in Germany; the calamities upon our native country, the bishops making havoc in the churches, putting down the faithful ministers, and advancing popish ceremonies and doctrines, the plague raging exceedingly, and famine and sword

> threatening them; the dangers of those at Connecticut, and of ourselves also, by the Indians; and the dissensions in our churches.[83]

The fact that this list reads something like a modern Associated Press news budget is, I believe, both interesting and important.

# # #

NOTES

[1]Winthrop's Journal, 2 vols., ed. by James Kendall Hosmer (New York, 1908), I, 266-68.

[2]News from New-England of a Most Strange and Prodigious Birth [London, 1642]; [John Winthrop], A Short Story of the Rise, Reign, and Ruin of the Antinomians, Familists & Libertines (London, 1644), reprinted in The Antinomian Controversy, 1636-1638: A Documentary History, ed. by David D. Hall (Middletown, Conn., 1968), pp. 280-282; [Samuel Danforth], An Almanac for the Year of Our Lord 1648 (Cambridge, 1648). The Dyer story and the publications connected with it are discussed in David D. Hall, "A World of Wonders: The Mentality of the Supernatural in Seventeenth-Century New England," in Seventeenth-Century New England, ed. by David D. Hall and David Grayson Allen (Boston, 1984). Throughout this essay I have modernized spelling and capitalization, and in dates I have begun the new year on January 1.

[3]See, for example, Everette E. Dennis and Arnold H. Ismach, Reporting Processes and Practices (Belmont, Calif., 1981), pp. 30-31; Brian S. Brooks, et al., News Reporting and Writing (2nd ed.; New York, 1985), pp. 4-5; Julian Harriss, et al., The Complete Reporter (5th ed.; New York, 1985), pp. 33-37.

[4]Matthias A. Shaaber, Some Forerunners of the Newspaper in England, 1476-1622 (Philadelphia, 1929), pp. 151-56; Robert Collison, The Story of Street Literature: Forerunner of the Popular Press (Santa Barbara, 1973), pp. 144-49. For a sampling of recent perspectives on the role of sensationalism in journalism, see Journalism History, XII (Autumn-Winter, 1985), a special issue on sensationalism.

[5]A Short Story, pp. 214, 282.

[6]Perry Miller, The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century (New York, 1939), pp. 463-65; Sacvan Bercovitch, The Puritan Origins of the American Self (New Haven, Conn., 1975), chap. 2; David M. Scobey, "Revising the Errand: New England's Ways and the Puritan Sense of the Past," William and Mary Quarterly, 3rd series, XLI (January, 1984), 3-31. See also Harry S. Stout, The New England Soul: Preaching and Religious Culture in Colonial New England (New York, 1986), pp. 69-70.

[7]Miller, New England Mind, chap. 8; Keith Thomas, Man and the Natural World: Changing Attitudes in England, 1500-1800 (London, 1983); Keith Thomas, Religion and the Decline of Magic (London, 1971); Robert Daly, God's Alter: The World and the Flesh in Puritan Poetry (Berkeley, Calif., 1978).

[8]Hall, "World of Wonders"; Richard Weisman, Witchcraft, Magic, and Religion in Seventeenth-Century Massachusetts (Amherst, Mass., 1983), chaps. 3-4; James A. Levernier, "Introduction," in a facsimile reproduction of Increase Mather's An Essay for the Recording of Illustrious Providences (Delmar, N.Y., 1977).

[9]Sacvan Bercovitch, The American Jeremiad (Madison, Wis., 1978), chaps. 1 and 6. See also Bercovitch, Puritan Origins, chap. 5; and Paul K. Conkin, Puritans and Pragmatists (Bloomington, Ind., 1968), chap. 1. For a useful overview of the current state of Puritan studies, see David D. Hall, "On Common Ground: The Coherence of American Puritan Studies," William and Mary Quarterly, 3rd series, XLIV (April, 1987), 193-229.

[10]Hall, "World of Wonders"; Stout, New England Soul, pp. 35.

[11]For biographical sketches of Danforth, see Cotton Mather, Magnalia Christi Americana, 2 vols. (Hartford, Conn., 1853), II, 59-65; John Langdon Sibley, Biographical Sketches of Graduates of Harvard University (Cambridge, 1873), I, 88-92. Magnalia was originally published in London in 1702.

[12]Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, The Printing Revolution in Early Modern Europe (Cambridge, England, 1983), chap. 6.

[13]David D. Hall, "The World of Print and Collective Mentality in Seventeenth-Century New England," in New Directions in American Intellectual History, ed. by John Higham and Paul K. Conkin (Baltimore, 1979); Kenneth A. Lockridge, Literacy in Colonial New England (New York, 1974), pp. 69-71.

[14]On the Cambridge press, see George Parker Winship, The Cambridge Press, 1638-1692 (Philadelphia, 1945); Samuel Eliot Morison, Founding of Harvard College (Cambridge, 1935).

[15]An Almanac for the Year of Our Lord 1646 (Cambridge, 1646), and subsequent editions for 1647, 1648, and 1649. See also Winship, Cambridge Press, pp. 74-80; and Paul R. Sternberg and John M. Brayer, "A Note on the Printing of the New England 'Almanacks,' 1646-1650," Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society, LXXXIV (October, 1984), 356-61.

[16]An Almanac, for 1647 and 1648.

[17]C. Mather, Magnalia, II, 61, 63.

[18]Samuel Danforth, An Astronomical Description of the Late Comet, or Blazing Star (Cambridge, 1665).

[19]Samuel Danforth, The Cry of Sodom Enquired Into (Cambridge, 1674). See also Ronald A. Bosco, "Introduction," in Sermons for Days of Fast, Prayer, and Humilation and Execution Sermons, facsimile reproductions (Delmar, N.Y., 1978), pp. lxxiii-lxxxiv.

[20]A.W. Plumstead, "An Introductory Essay," in The Wall and the Garden: Selected Massachusetts Election Sermons, 1670-1775 (Minneapolis, 1968), p. 6.

[21]Samuel Danforth, A Brief Recognition of New-England's Errand into the Wilderness (Cambridge, 1671), reprinted in Plumstead, Wall and the Garden. Danforth was not the first preacher to use the phrase "errand into the wilderness," but his sermon was the first published use of it. On the interpretative uses of this title and the concept of "errand," see Perry Miller, Errand into the Wilderness (Cambridge, 1956); and Sacvan Bercovitch, "New England's Errand Reappraised," in New Directions, ed by Higham and Conkin.

[22]Danforth, A Brief Recognition, pp. 73-74, 77. On the "declension" theme, see Hall, "On Common Ground," p. 221.

[23]Sacvan Bercovitch uses A Brief Recognition as an exemplar of the jeremiad style. See Bercovitch, American Jeremiad, p. 16.

[24]Bosco, "Introduction," pp. xxi-lxxiii; George Harrison Orians, "Introduction," in Cotton Mather, Days of Humiliation: Times of Affliction and Disaster, facsimile reproductions of nine sermons, ed. by George Harrison Orians (Gainesville, Fla., 1970).

[25]I derived the data reported in the tables through a classification of all the titles printed in New England before 1701 as listed in Charles Evans, American Bibliography, vol. I: 1639-1720 (Chicago, 1903). I simply followed the manifest content of the title to make the classifications that appear in Table 2. (Table 1 is a summary of Table 2.) If the proper classification was not clearly indicated by the title, I did not include that title. I made no effort to purge Evans' "ghost" publications, of which there are many, including some very early almanacs. On the other hand, Evans is short on proclamations and orders, as is clear from a glance at Roger P. Bristol, Supplement to Charles Evans' American Bibliography (Charlottesville, Va., 1970). On the whole, I suspect that my count is a somewhat conservative estimate of event-orientation. Because my purpose is to show only very rough comparisons, I have thought it unnecessary to include here the explicit coding rules that I used to define the categories of Table 2.

[26]Stout, New England Soul, pp. 74-75.

[27]Michael Wigglesworth, "God's Controversy with New-England" (written 1662), in Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society, XII (May, 1871), 91.

[28]On the General Court's regulation of printing, see Clyde Augustus Duniway, The Development of Freedom of the Press in Massachusetts (New York, 1906), chaps. 4-5. On the move of printing to Boston, see Winship, Cambridge Press, pp. 267-69; and Lawrence C. Wroth, The Colonial Printer (Portland, Me., 1938), p. 18.

[29]The standard biography of Mather is Kenneth Ballard Murdock, Increase Mather: The Foremost American Puritan (Cambridge, 1925). More recent interpretations are Robert Middlekauff, The Mathers: Three Generations of Puritan Intellectuals, 1596-1728 (New York, 1971); and Mason I. Lowance, Jr., Increase Mather (New York, 1974).

[30]Increase Mather, The Day of Trouble is Near (Cambridge, 1674), reprinted in Sermons for Days of Fast, ed. by Bosco; "The Autobiography of Increase Mather," ed. by Michael G. Hall, Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society, LXXI (October 1961), p. 302. See also Middlekauff, Mathers, pp. 106-07; and Lowance, Increase Mather, pp. 31-32, and chap. 2.

[31]Stephen Saunders Webb, 1676: The End of American Independence (Cambridge, 1985), p. 243. See also Douglas Edward Leach, Flintlock and Tomahawk: New England in King Philip's War (New York, 1958); and David Horowitz, The First Frontier: The Indian Wars and America's Origins, 1607-1776 (New York, 1978).

[32]Increase Mather, A Brief History of the War with the Indians in New-England (Boston, 1676); and An Earnest Exhortation to the Inhabitants of New-England (Boston, 1676). Both are reprinted in So Dreadfull a Judgment: Puritan Responses to King Philip's War, 1676-1677, ed. by Richard Slotkin and James K. Folsom (Middletown, Conn., 1978). Page numbers are to this edition.

[33]I. Mather, Brief History, p. 86. The other major instant history of the war was William Hubbard's A Narrative of the Troubles with the Indians in New-England (Boston, 1677). Unlike Mather, Hubbard doubted that specific events could be interpreted clearly as specific prodigies, but like Mather he had no doubt that the overall events of the war were guided by the hand of God for the instruction of New England. See So Dreadfull a Judgment, ed. by Slotkin and Folsom, p. 234. See also David D. Hall, The Faithful Shepherd: A History of the New England Ministry in the Seventeenth Century (Chapel Hill, 1972), pp. 240-41.

[34]I. Mather, Brief History, p. 34.

[35]"Some Proposals Concerning the Recording of Illustrious Providences," in Increase Mather, An Essay for the Recording of Illustrious Providences (Boston, 1684), preface.

[36]Hall, "World of Wonders," pp. 234-45, 267-70; Lowance, Increase Mather, pp. 89-90; Levernier, "Introduction," pp. xii-xiii.

[37]Increase Mather, The Doctrine of Divine Providences, Opened and Applied (Boston, 1684), p. 34. See also Middlekauff, Mathers, p. 144.

[38]Increase Mather, Heaven's Alarm to the World (Boston, 1681); Kometographia (Boston, 1683); Cases of Conscience Concerning Evil Spirits (Boston, 1693); The Voice of God in Stormy Winds (Boston, 1704); A Discourse Concerning Earthquakes (Boston, 1706); Burnings Bewailed (Boston, 1711).

[39]I. Mather, Burnings Bewailed, p. 4.

[40]For example, see Webb, 1676, books two and three; Richard R. Johnson, Adjustments to Empire: The New England Colonies, 1676-1715 (Brunswick, N.J., 1981); and David S. Lovejoy, The Glorious Revolution in America (New York, 1972).

[41]See Evans, American Bibliography, and Bristol, Supplement to Evans, for these years. See also, The Glorious Revolution in America: Documents on the Colonial Crisis of 1689, ed. by Michael G. Hall, Lawrence H. Leder, and Michael G. Kammen (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1964).

[42]Both of these tracts and other Mather pieces are reprinted in Publications of the Prince Society, vol. 6: The Andros Tracts (Boston, 1869).

[43]Increase Mather, Narrative of the Miseries of New-England (London, 1688), pp. 6-7.

[44]"Autobiography of Increase Mather," p. 308. See also Lovejoy, Glorious Revolution, p. 154.

[45]Diary of Cotton Mather, quoted in Kenneth Silverman, The Life and Times of Cotton Mather (New York, 1985), pp. 47-48. See also Cotton Mather, The Call of the Gospel (Boston, 1686); and Military Duties (Boston, 1687).

[46]Cotton Mather, The Terror of the Lord. Some Account of the Earthquake that Shook New-England (Boston, 1727); and Boanerges. A Short Essay to Preserve and Strengthen Good Impressions Produced by Earthquakes (Boston, 1727). Both are reproduced in Days of Humiliation, ed. by Orians. See also Silverman, Life and Times, pp. 417-19.

[47]Cotton Mather, Brontologia Sacra: The Voice of the Glorious God in the Thunder (London, 1795), also in Magnalia, II, 363-72; Silverman, Life and Times, pp. 195, 197. Of course, for a man who published some 388 separate titles in his career, such spontaneity may suggest an attention to efficiency as much as to teleology. On Mather's publishing record, see George Selement, "Publication and the Puritan Minister," William and Mary Quarterly, 3rd series, XXXVII (April, 1980), 223-24.

[48]C. Mather, Magnalia, I, 25. Cf., the first general history of New England, Edward Johnson's Wonder-Working Providence of Sion's Savior in New-England (London, 1654), facsimile reproduction (Delmar, N.Y., 1974).

[49]C. Mather, Magnalia, II, 341.

[50]Leon V. Sigal, "Sources Make the News," in Reading the News, ed. by Robert Karl Manhoff and Michael Schudson (New York, 1986). The essays in this book provide a useful and up-to-date overview of scholarly thinking on journalism methodology. See also Gay Tuchman, "Objectivity as Strategic Ritual: An Examination of Newsmen's Notions of Objectivity," American Journal of Sociology, LXXVII (January, 1972), 660-77.

[51]An Almanac, for 1647, 1648, and 1649; Danforth, An Astronomical Description, pp. 16-20; Danforth, A Brief Recognition, pp. 61-62, 74.

[52]Murdock, Increase Mather, pp. 146-47, 167-71. See also Levernier, "Introduction," p. xiii.

[53]Lowance, Increase Mather, pp. 89-90; I. Mather, An Essay, preface and passim. See also Mather's reference to his historical method ("to relate things truly and impartially") in A Brief History, p. 81.

[54]Middlekauff, Mathers, p. 145; Hall, "World of Wonders," pp. 267-68. This is precisely the conventional method of modern journalism. See Sigal, "Sources Make the News," pp. 15-16; Tuchman, "Objectivity as Strategic Ritual."

[55]Silverman, Life and Times, pp. 247-53; Samuel G. Drake, "A Memoir of Cotton Mather," a preface to the 1853 edition of Magnalia, I, xxxi. Examples of this style are common in Cotton Mather's work. In addition to Magnalia, see The Wonders of the Invisible World (Boston, 1692); "Biblia Americana," in The Mather Papers, microfilm (Cambridge, 1970); and "Curiosa Americana," in the Royal Society, London.

[56]Silverman, Life and Times, p. 252.

[57]Winthrop's Journal, I, 267-68.

[58]Bosco, "Introduction"; Stout, New England Soul, pp. 3-4. Stout writes: "For all intents and purposes, the sermon was the only regular voice of authority."

[59]Duniway, Freedom of the Press, chaps. 4-5.

[60]"Some Proposals Concerning the Recording of Illustrious Providences," n.p. See also the concern for authoritative control of publication in a similar proposal of 1694: Proposals Made by the President and Fellows of Harvard College . . . to Observe and Record Illustrious Discoveries of the Divine Providence (Boston, 1694), also in C. Mather, Magnalia, II, 342.

[61]Evans, American Bibliography, I, 37-44; Bristol, Supplement to Evans, pp. 4-5. There are several collections of King Philip's War reprints. See So Dreadfull and Judgment, ed. by Slotkin and Folsom; Narratives of the Indian Wars, 1675-1699, ed. by Charles H. Lincoln (New York, 1913); and King Philip's War Narratives (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1966).

[62]I. Mather, Brief History, p. 174. See also Stout, New England Soul, pp. 78-82.

[63]Of course, the war news published in London during the war was outside the authoritative Puritan teleological style. Indeed, the London newspapers and news-sheets tended to credit the war to Puritan incompetence and maladministration rather than to divine providence. See Webb, 1676,

pp. 221-22. For a critical narrative written from the Quaker point of view, see [Edward Wharton], New-England's Present Sufferings (London, 1675).

[64]The narratives are both reprinted, with helpful introductions, in So Dreadfull a Judgment, ed. by Slotkin and Folsom. Cf., Cotton Mather's very "providential" account of Church's victory in Magnalia, II, 574. Witchcraft provides another illustration of how New Englanders read religous meaning from events. And the history of witchcraft accusations as well as slander charges that involved witchcraft suggests how the widespread observation, reporting, and interpretation of occurrences by common folk could take turns quite different from what the authorities had in mind. The best work on this angle of witchcraft is John Demos, Entertaining Satan: Witchcraft and the Culture of Early New England (New York, 1982).

[65]The first newspaper to be printed in America was a copy, pure and simple. In 1685, Samuel Green reprinted in Boston the February 9, 1685, issue of The London Gazette, announcing the death of King Charles. This is reprinted in Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society, XIII (November, 1873), 105-08. Later American newspapers continued to model themselves on, if not simply reprint, The London Gazette. See Charles E. Clark, The Public Prints, 1665-1750: An Essay in Newspaper Origins (forthcoming), part one. See also Willard G. Bleyer, Main Currents in the History of American Journalism (Boston, 1927), chap. 1.

[66]Boston News-Letter, April 30, 1704. The best study of Campbell and his relationship to London journalism is Clark, Public Prints, chap. 5.

[67]Boston News-Letter, July 17, 1704; August 28, 1704.

[68]Ibid., May 29, 1704; June 5, 1704; June 12, 1704; June 19, 1704.

[69]Ibid., June 12, 1704; June 19, 1704; June 26, 1704; July 3, 1704.

[70]The Diary of Samuel Sewall, 1674-1729, 2 vols., ed. by M. Halsey Thomas (New York, 1973), I, 512: Cotton Mather, Faithful Warnings to Prevent Fearful Judgments (Boston, 1704); I. Mather, The Voice of God in Stormy Winds, pp. 3-4, 7-8, 12, 14, 39, 49-51.

[71]See, for example, Boston News-Letter, April 24, 1704; May 8, 1704; May 15, 1704; June 19, 1704.

[72]Ibid., May 8, 1704. A contemporary handwritten note on the American Antiquarian Society copy explains the deception. See also ibid., November 5, 1705, and November 12, 1705, for another source-based hoax. Charles Clark points out how Campbell never apologized for misleading his readers, but rather congratulated himself in a later issue for exposing the hoax. See Clark, Public Prints, chap. 5.

[73]New-England Courant, December 4, 1721. See also C. Edward Wilson, "The Boston Inoculation Controversy: A Revisionist Interpretation," Journalism History, VII (Spring, 1980), 16-19, 40.

[74]New-England Courant, February 5, 1722; I. Mather, Brief History, p. 81. See also Thomas Leonard, The Power of the Press: The Birth of American Political Reporting (New York, 1986), chap. 1.

[75]Pennsylvania Gazette, June 10, 1731, reprinted in The Papers of Benjamin Franklin, ed. by Leonard W. Labaree (New Haven, Conn., 1959), I, 195. See also Jeffery A. Smith, Printers and Press Freedom: The Ideology of Early American Journalism (New York, 1987); and Stephen Botein, "'Meer Mechanics' and an Open Press: The Business and Political Strategies of Colonial American Printers," Perspectives in American History, IX (1975), 127-225.

[76]Pennsylvania Gazette, July 30, 1730.

[77]Ibid., October 2, 1729. Franklin's prospectus, "The Printer to the Reader," appears in Papers of Benjamin Franklin, ed. by Labaree, I, 157-59.

[78]Pennsylvania Gazette, October 16, 1729; October 27, 1729; December 1, 1729: January 6, 1730; January 13, 1730; January 27, 1730. Some of these items are reprinted in Papers of Benjamin Franklin, ed. by Labaree, I, 164-68, 184-89.

[79]Another catch-phrase in turn-of-the-century American journalism is the "gee-whiz emotion." As William Randolph Hearst's great editor Arthur McEwen put it, "We run our paper so that when the reader opens it he says: 'Gee-whiz!'" Quote in Will Irwin, "The American Newspaper: Part 3, The Fourth Current," Collier's, XLVI (February 18, 1911), 15. A current expression still carries the religious echo: "Reporters call it a 'Holy shit!' story, the kind that freezes the reader's cup of coffee -- or at least the arm holding it -- in midair." Quote in Carlin Romano, "The Grisy Truth about Bare Facts," in Reading the News, ed. by Manoff and Schudson, pp. 44-45.

[80]Chicago Times, January 24, 1876. See also David Paul Nord, "The Public Community: The Urbanization of Journalism in Chicago," Journal of Urban History, XI (August, 1985), 411-41; Gunther Barth, City People: The Rise of Modern City Culture in Nineteenth-Century America (New York, 1980), chap. 3.

[81]Romano, "The Grisy Truth." See also Gaye Tuchman, Making News (New York, 1978); and Herbert Gans, Deciding What's News (New York, 1980).

[82]These were the lead stories in three different papers in the same week: Weekly World News, February 10, 1987; The Sun, February 10, 1987; National Examiner, February 10, 1987.

[83]Winthrop's Journal, I, 208.

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TABLES

Table 1

Number of Event-Oriented Imprints Published in New England, During and After the Restriction of Printing to Cambridge.

Titles	1639-1674	1675-1700	1639-1700
A. Event Imprints	94	332	426
B. Total New England Imprints	197	580	777
% A. of B	48%	57%	55%

Source: Charles Evans, American Bibliography, vol. I: 1639-1720 (Chicago, 1903). See also footnote #25.

Table 2

Number of Event-Oriented Imprints Published in New England, During and After the Restriction of Printing to Cambridge, Broken Down by Type of Publication.

	1639-1674		1675-1700	
	Number	%	Number	%
1. Proclamations, Orders, & Laws	30	32%	132	40%
2. "Occasional" Sermons	25	27%	56	17%
3. Histories & Narratives	2	2%	53	16%
4. Natural Occurrences	3	3%	20	6%
5. Almanacs	27	29%	43	13%
6. Obituaries	7	7%	28	8%
Total N.E. Imprints	94	100%	332	100%

Source: Charles Evans, American Bibliography, vol. I: 1639-1729 (Chicago, 1903). See also footnote #25.